DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 134 662 UD 016 729

AUTHOR Thorsell, Bernard A.
TITLE Inter-Generational Factors in Ethnic Differences in Self-Esteem
PUB DATE 8 Apr 76
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at The Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (Los Angeles, Calif., April 8-11, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Caucasians; *Comparative Analysis; *Ethnic Groups; Ethnic Status; Mexican Americans; *Minority Groups; Negroes; Pilot Projects; *Self Concept; *Self Esteem; *Self Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This document reports on a pilot study undertaken to determine what patterns of self-esteem would be found in a comparison of the self-evaluations of white, black, and Chicano adolescents and adults. The goals of the study were: (1) to test the hypothesis that the self-evaluations of minority adolescents would display more positive self-esteem than those of minority adults, and (2) to evaluate the validity of the established view that low self-esteem is always characteristic of members of oppressed minorities. One hundred and sixty two adolescent males, aged 11 to 17, and 104 adult males, aged 23 to 58 were selected randomly from three public schools and their corresponding communities in the Los Angeles area. Self-evaluation responses were classified as positive, negative, or neutral by content. Among the findings of the study are the following: (1) all subjects displayed high self-esteem regardless of ethnic status (2) black adolescents showed a much higher proportion of positive self-evaluations than black adults, (3) inter-generational differences between Chicano adolescents and adults were marginal and (4) differences between white adolescents and adults were significant. (Author/AM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED134662

INTER-GENERATIONAL FACTORS IN ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN SELF-ESTEEM

Bernard Alan Thorsell
California State University
Northridge

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Bernard A. Thorsell

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Los Angeles, California, April 8-11, 1976.

UD016729

INTER-GENERATIONAL FACTORS IN ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN SELF-ESTEEM

Bernard Alan Thorsell
California State University, Northridge

Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Western Psychological Association, Los Angeles, California, April 8-11, 1976.

ABSTRACT

Problem

Recent research has found positive self-esteem among black and chicano adolescent subjects. This may be due to positive effects of recent increases in ethnic pride and awareness on these young subjects. This hypothesis was tested by comparing self-evaluations of white, black, and chicano adolescents and adults.

Method

162 adolescent males, 11 to 17 and 104 adult males, 23 to 58, were selected randomly from three public schools and their corresponding communities, respectively. Subjects wrote twenty statements best identifying them in answering the question "Who Am I?" Self-evaluatory responses were classified as "positive," "negative," "neutral" by content. Relationships between self-esteem and ethnic status were analyzed, and inter-generational differences were examined.

Results

Significant relationships between self-esteem and ethnic status were found in comparing responses of black to chicano adolescents and in comparing responses of white to chicano and white to black adults. Significant inter-generational differences in self-esteem

were found between white adolescents and adults and between black adolescents and adults.

Conclusions

All subjects displayed high self-esteem regardless of ethnic status. Black adolescents showed a much higher proportion of positive self-evaluations than black adults. Inter-generational differences between chicano adolescents and adults were marginal. Differences between white adolescents and adults were significant. These findings support the research hypothesis for black subjects but not for chicano subjects.

INTER-GENERATIONAL FACTORS IN ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN SELF-ESTEEM

Introduction

The view that low self-esteem and negative self-concept are typical of members of oppressed minorities in American society has been expressed frequently by both professional social scientists[1] and lay members of minority communities.[2] This view of self-concept for members of oppressed minorities expresses perhaps the most readily anticipated psychological consequence of having grown up in a minority status in which one is expected to take on the identity of a social person who, historically, has been regarded by the majority as psychologically and socially inferior. At the same time the possibility that such self-concept and self-esteem can be altered through social experience has been given sizable empirical support by recent research findings.

Golin,[3] in a 1971 paper, reports on a project designed to develop "black consciousness" in black elementary school children. The project involved the participation of 5th and 6th grade children in activities designed to develop racial awareness and pride. Measures of emotional adjustment were administered to the children at the beginning and again at the end of the project with the finding that the largely negative initial self-evaluations of the children tended to become more positive at the conclusion of the project.

Lessing,[4] in a 1973 paper, discusses the results of an administration of the Black Power Ideology Scale and an adjective checklist to black high school students. She found that while the students as a whole scored low on positive self-concept, as measured by the adjective checklist, students scoring highest

on the Black Power Ideology Scale also scored significantly higher on positive self-concept.

The author,[5] in a 1975 study, analyzed the self-evaluations of Black and Chicano children. Both Black and Chicano subjects displayed preponderantly positive self-esteem. However, Black subjects showed a greater proportion of positive self-evaluation than did the Chicano subjects.

These research findings cast considerable doubt on the belief that low self-esteem and negative self-concept are always characteristic of members of oppressed minorities in American society. Moreover, these findings suggest the possibility that the positive self-esteem displayed by the subjects in these studies may be due, in large part, to the positive psychological effects of having grown up during a decade that has been marked by significant increases in ethnic pride and awareness in minority communities in the U.S.

In order to explore these issues empirically, a pilot study was undertaken to determine what patterns of self-esteem would be discernible in a comparison of the self-evaluations of white, black and chicano adolescents and adults. The goals of the study were twofold: 1) to test the research hypothesis that the self-evaluations of minority adolescents should display more positive self-esteem than those of minority adults; 2) to evaluate the validity of the established view that low self-esteem is always characteristic of members of oppressed minorities.

Procedure

The Twenty Statements Test developed by Kuhu and McPartland[6] was administered to two groups of male subjects. The juvenile group, consisting of 162 male subjects between the ages of 11 and 16, was randomly selected from three public schools located in three different ethnic communities in the Los

Angeles area. The subjects included 75 white, 63 chicano, and 24 black subjects. The adult group, consisting of 104 males between the ages of 23 and 58, was randomly selected from the same ethnic communities as was the juvenile group. The subjects included 60 white, 17 chicano, and 27 black subjects.

Each subject was asked to respond to the question "Who Am I?" by writing twenty brief statements that he thought best described him as he saw himself. Approximately twenty minutes were allowed for the task. The formal instructions were as follows:

> "Please write twenty answers to the question "Who Am I?" Just give twenty different answers to this question. Write your answers in the order in which they occur to you. Go along fairly fast; time is limited."

This technique, known variously as the "Who Are you?" the "Who Am I?" or the "Twenty Statements" test, was developed originally by Bugental and Zelen[7] as the "Who Are You?" test of self-concept. It was later expanded by Kuhn and McPartland[8] as an instrument for analyzing self-concept within the framework of symbolic interactionism. The test assumes that self-concept is an internalization and organization of identities that significant others have attributed, or are currently attributing, to the subject, combined with the results of interactions based on these identities. It also assumes that the subject sees himself involved in social action and that he organizes his behavior symbolically to fit his conceptions of himself, of the situation in which action takes place, and of other actors in the situation.[9]

Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the research procedure.

Hypothesis I: Significant differences in self-esteem should be found between minority and white adults.

Hypothesis II: No significant differences in self-esteem should be found between minority and white adolescents.

Hypothesis III: Significant differences in self-esteem should be found between white adolescents and adults, black adolescents and adults, and chicano adolescents and adults.

All responses were found to be sortable into four categories according to content, as follows: physical characteristics, social roles, interests-likes-dislikes, and self-evaluations. All self-evaluation responses were further classified as either "positive," "negative," or "neutral." An analysis of the relationship between self-esteem, as indicated by the self-evaluation responses, ethnic status, and generational status was then undertaken. A series of X^2 analyses was performed to determine the degrees of association between self-esteem and ethnic status and between self-esteem and generational status. In each case, the null hypothesis of no association between self-esteem and these statuses was tested.

Results

First, somewhat less than two-thirds of all of the self-evaluations of the adult subjects were classifiable as positive in content but significant differences between proportions of positive to negative and positive to neutral responses were noted for each of the three ethnic groups of subjects. White adults displayed the greatest proportion of positive evaluations, blacks exhibited the next largest, and the chicano adults showed the smallest proportion of positive self-evaluations. X^2 computed for the degree of association between self-esteem and ethnic status was found to be significant at the .01 level in a comparison of white and black adults and in a comparison of white and chicano adults. However, no significant differences in self-esteem were found

in a comparison of black and chicano adults ($p=>.05$).

Second, approximately two-thirds of all of the self-evaluations of adolescent subjects were classifiable as positive in content but, as in the case of the adult subjects, significant differences between proportions of positive to negative and positive to neutral responses were noted for each ethnic group. Black adolescents displayed the greatest proportion of positive evaluations, white subjects exhibited the next largest proportion, and chicano subjects exhibited the smallest proportion of positive self-evaluations. X^2 computed for the degree of association between self-esteem and ethnic status was found to be significant at the .01 level in a comparison of black and chicano adolescents. However, no significant differences in self-esteem were found in a X^2 comparison of white and black adolescents ($p=>.10$). Similarly, X^2 reached only the .05 level of significance for differences in self-esteem in a comparison of white and chicano adolescents.

Third, statistically significant inter-generational differences in self-esteem were found in X^2 comparisons of white adolescents and adults ($p=<.02$) and of black adolescents and adults ($p=<.01$). However, no significant differences in self-esteem were found between chicano adolescents and adults when compared by X^2 technique ($p=>.30$).

Interpretation

All three of the research hypotheses of this study have been given strong support by these results. Hypothesis I, which predicted significant differences in self-esteem between minority and white adults, is well supported by the finding of a statistically significant relationship between ethnic status and self-esteem for adults in the comparisons of the self-evaluations of white adults and black adults and of white adults and chicano

adults. The hypothesis is given further support by the finding of no statistically significant differences in self-esteem in a comparison of black adults and chicano adults.

Hypothesis II, which predicted a finding of no significant differences in self-esteem between minority and white adolescents, is clearly supported by the lack of a statistically significant relationship between ethnic status and self-esteem for adolescents in the comparison of the self-evaluation patterns of white and black adolescents and in the comparison of white and chicano adolescents. Additional support for the hypothesis is provided by the finding of a statistically significant relationship between ethnic status and self-esteem in the comparison of black and chicano adolescents.

Hypothesis III, which predicted significant differences in self-esteem between white, black and chicano adolescents and adults, is supported by the finding of statistically significant intergenerational differences in self-esteem between white adolescents and adults and between black adolescents and adults. However, the finding of no significant differences in self-esteem between chicano adolescents and adults precludes complete support for this hypothesis.

Conclusions and Implications

First, the results of the data analysis indicate that all groups of subjects in this study exhibit relatively high self-esteem and positive self-concept. These results contradict the widely held belief that low self-esteem and negative self-concept are typical of members of oppressed minorities in the U.S.. In this research, both adolescent and adult black and chicano subjects exhibit relatively high self-esteem and positive

self-concept, as evidenced by their predominantly positive patterns of self-evaluation. Moreover, in the juvenile group, black subjects significantly exceed white subjects in this regard.

Second, the high self-esteem and positive self-concept displayed by black subjects in this study may well be a function of the heightened ethnic pride and awareness that have taken place among members of the black community over the past decade. Certainly, the much greater proportion of positive self-evaluations by black adolescents (86.9%) in comparison to black adults (55%) suggests that the self-concepts and self-esteem of these adolescents quite probably were shaped by the significant changes in the private and public images of black people that took place during their early formative years.

Finally, several of the results of this study suggest the need for much more intensive research in this area. One such result is the finding of a large difference in the proportions of positive self-evaluation responses between black and chicano adolescents. The very large ratio of positive to negative responses for black adolescents in contrast to the relatively small ratio of positive to negative responses for chicano adolescents certainly bears further investigation. Complementary to this result are the findings of no significant inter-generational differences in self-esteem between chicano adolescents and adults ($p=>.30$), on the one hand, and significant inter-generational differences between black adolescents and adults ($p=<.01$), on the other.

Although any sustained effort to explain these results without further research would be gratuitous, to say the very least, one tentative interpretation does come to mind. First, in attempting to understand these

differences within the general framework of interpretation applied to the results of this research, it could be concluded that the changes in the private and public images of chicano people over the past decade, have been in comparison to those of black people, less all-pervasive, generally less positive, and to have had a less positive effect upon the self-esteem of the chicano child growing up under these changing conditions. Second, the chicano community has historically been a "non-assimilationist" minority in American society. That is to say, it has chosen to retain its ethnic identity through the maintenance of its Spanish language, religious, culinary, and other cultural traditions. Therefore, it can be said that its effects on its members have been largely "centripedal," holding them close to conservative traditions.[9] "Assimilationist" minority communities, such as the black community, on the other hand, tend to exert more of a "centrifugal" force on their members, encouraging them to identify with the values of the larger society and to work for social and economic assimilation wherever possible. Given these basic cultural differences between the chicano and black communities, it is easy to see that the taking on, by a young person, of a social identity more positive than that held by his elders might be a great deal more difficult task to accomplish for the chicano child than for the black. Such reasoning makes possible at least one ad hoc interpretation of the differences in self-esteem found between black and chicano adolescents and black and chicano adolescents and adults in this study. However, the discovery of the more profound reasons for such findings can be accomplished only through further intensive study of the role of ethnic factors in the formation of self-concept and self-esteem. Such research, in order to yield significant results, must of necessity take the researcher much more deeply into the ethnic communities involved than has been possible in this study.

FOOTNOTES

1. See James A. Banks and Jean D. Grambs (Eds.), Black Self-Concept: Implications for Education and Social Science. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1972;

   E. Earl Baughman, Black Americans. New York, Academic Press, 1971;

   Celia Heller, Mexican American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads. New York, Random House, 1966;

   Reginald L. Jones (Ed.), Black Psychology. New York, Harper and Row, 1972;

   William Madsen, The Mexican Americans of South Texas, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964;

   Thomas F. Pettigrew, A Profile of the Negro American. Princeton, New Jersey, Van Nostrand, 1964;

   Roger Wilcox, The Psychological Consequences of Being a Black American: A Sourcebook of Research by Black Psychologists. New York, Wiley, 1971.

2. See Eldridge Cleaver, Soul on Ice. New York, McGraw-Hill, 1968.

3. Sanford Golin, "Project Self-Esteem: Some Effects of an Elementary School Black Studies Program." APA Annual Convention Proceedings, 1971, Vol. 6 (pt. 2), 733-734;

4. Elsie E. Lessing, "Self-Concept of Black High School Students Varying in Endorsement of Black Power Ideology." APA Annual Convention Proceedings, 1973, Vol. 8, 227-228.

5. Bernard A. Thorsell, "Self-Esteem and Ethnic Status." Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Western Psychological Association, Sacramento, California, April 24-26, 1975.

6. Manford H. Kuhn and Thomas S. McPartland, "An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes." American Sociological Review, Vol. 19, 1954, 68-76;

7. J. F. T. Bugental and S. L. Zelen. "Investigations Into the "Self-Concept:" I. The W-A-Y Technique." Journal of Personality, 1950, 18, 483-498.

8. Kuhn and McPartland, op. cit.

   See also:

FOOTNOTES (continued)

Carl J. Couch, "Self-Attitudes and Degree of Agreement with Immediate Others." American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 63, 1958, 491-496;

Thomas S. McPartland, John H. Cummings, and Wynona S. Garretson, "Self-Conception and Ward Behavior in Two Psychiatric Hospitals." Sociometry, Vol. 24, 1961, 111-124.

9. See Aniceto Aramoni, "Machismo," Psychology Today, January, 1972; also Celia Heller, Mexican-American Youth. New York, Random House, 1966; also Madsen, op. cit.